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This article examines British deception operations in the early Cold War. It illustrates how, in the years before Britain could threaten atomic retaliation, Britain's deception organisation, the London Controlling Section (LCS) was tasked with conducting operations to deter the USSR and China from starting a war or threatening British interests. It introduces a number of their ploys – some physical and military, others subversive and political. It argues that the LCS faced significant challenges in implementing its deceptions. Repeating the great strategic successes of the Second World War was extremely difficult; what remained for the Cold War were more limited deceptions.

Key Words: British intelligence, deception, deterrence, London Controlling Section, Directorate of Forward Plans.

Introduction

Few areas of statecraft are more secret than deception operations. Intelligence agencies, fearful of compromising ongoing activities, remain wary of revealing historical operations and techniques. This secrecy is reflected in the scholarly analysis of British deception, which has until recently focused overwhelmingly on the Second World War. The documentary evidence has allowed little more, and the practice rarely features in the historiography of the Cold War. Its relative absence from the literature suggests Britain may have lost its appetite for deception after 1945, but this was not the case.¹

This article examines British deception policy and deception for deterrence operations in the early years of the Cold War, before Britain gained an atomic capability. It is based on recent documentary

¹ Deception in the Cold War is discussed to a greater or lesser degree by Julian Lewis, *Changing Direction: British Military Planning for Post-War Strategic Defence, 1942-47* (London: Frank Cass, 2003); Richard J. Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand: Britain, America, and Cold War Secret Intelligence* (London: John Murray, 2001); Stephen Twigge and Len Scott, *Planning Armageddon*, (Amsterdam: Routledge, 2000); Stephen Twigge and Len Scott, 'Strategic Defence by Deception' *Intelligence and National Security* 16/2 (2001); Len Scott and Huw Dylan, 'Cover for Thor: Divine Deception Planning for Cold War Missiles' *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 33/5 (2010); Thaddeus Holt, *The Deceivers: Allied military Deception in the Second World War* (London: Phoenix, 2005); Stephen Dorril, *MI6: Fifty Years of Special Operations* (London: Fourth Estate, 2000).

releases that allow us to trace the contours of Cold War deception and to draw some conclusions about its uses and limits. It expands our understanding of British deception in four areas: what happened to the deception machinery after the war; what did politicians and planners think it could achieve in a Cold War context; what kinds of deception for deterrence operations were planned and implemented against the USSR and China; what challenges did Britain face when attempting to deceive Cold War rivals? It illustrates how the deception machinery evolved in the late 1940s in the context of the Soviet strategic threat. It argues that the organisation was engaged in forming plans for future war, supporting British rule in the colonies, and in designing ad-hoc schemes to support British interests in response to crises, but that in the early years of the Cold War supporting Britain's strategy of deterrence became the deceivers' primary objective. Using a variety of techniques, and some imaginative plans, they attempted to exaggerate British strength, disguise its weaknesses, and to persuade Stalin to focus on internal security rather than foreign aggression. However, Britain faced considerable difficulties in implementing many of its ambitious, strategic schemes; what remained practical in Cold War conditions were limited operations.

The Deception Organisation

Britain's deception machinery was severely cut in 1945. Its very survival was due to an initiative by the Secretary to the Chiefs of Staff (CoS), Leslie Hollis, who had discussed the matter with Dudley Clarke, a senior wartime deception planner, and concluded that an organisation was required in peace to prepare for war. He was supported by other figures in the CoS, men like General Hastings Ismay, who believed that continuity was essential lest wartime lessons be forgotten.² With their backing, two experienced deception officers, Clarke and Admiral John Godfrey, were tasked with chronicling their work in several in-house volumes, and the deception organisation, the London Controlling Section (LCS) survived. In 1946 it constituted three officers, one from each service.³

Two developments prompted the transformation of the LCS from its somewhat dormant early Cold War existence, both related to the Soviet threat. In April 1946 Henry Tizard circulated his report on 'Future Development in Weapons and Methods of War', which advocated using deception in war and maintaining dedicated staff in peace.⁴ This was approved by the Cabinet Defence Committee in July.⁵ Second, in May 1946 Stuart Menzies, Chief, or 'C', of the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS)

² Lewis, *Changing Direction*, p.lxxv.

³ *ibid*, p.lxxv.

⁴ *ibid*, p.lxxvi.

⁵ *ibid*, p.lxxvi.

supported expanding deception operations, and proposed rejuvenating the LCS. The Soviets' pervasive intelligence gathering activities, he suggested, if adequately manipulated 'may provide suitable channels for the transmission of deception material to the Russians at a later stage.'⁶ With more staff to ensure cooperation with the Security Service (MI5) and SIS, the LCS faced the Cold War with fresh terms of reference in 1947.⁷

The Cold War LCS differed from its wartime variant. Its work was more difficult. It did not enjoy the advantages and insights its predecessor had owing to signals intelligence (SIGINT), ULTRA in particular. Therefore, it had to develop and utilise different techniques. Also, its role was broader. Planners realised that given Britain's global presence, its relative decline, and the requirement to combat Communism politically and militarily, peacetime deception was 'concerned as much with foreign policy as with imperial strategy.'⁸ Thus, the LCS required a different relationship with senior policy makers to the wartime arrangement.

The matter of management and coordination was resolved in 1947 – albeit temporarily – with the establishment of an executive committee to oversee the LCS and ensure coordination with other departments. Its members were the Chief Staff Officer to the Minister of Defence, the Permanent Under Secretary of the Foreign Office, the Head of the Civil Service, the CoS represented by the Directors of Plans, the Controlling Officer, and the Chiefs of MI5 and SIS. The Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) approved of the structure in July 1947. And the Committee was named 'The Hollis Committee' after its chairman, Leslie Hollis.⁹

This arrangement survived for two years before being reformed to bring the deception organisation closer still to the Joint Planning Staff (JPS). The catalyst for reform was the difficulty the LCS faced in planning and implementing operations in 1947 and 1948. This was primarily due to the challenge of developing 'channels' to feed deceptive information into the USSR. As they noted, 'a very limited number of double agents have been started, but in each case they have terminated through one cause or another before any useful build up has been achieved.'¹⁰

This led some to question the utility of deception in the Cold War and the value of maintaining the LCS. The Hollis Committee and the 'S Section' of the JPS investigated the matter. Both concluded

⁶ CAB 121/110, Stuart Menzies, 'Deception Organisation in Peace' attached to Hollis, 6 May 1946.

⁷ CAB 81/80, HC (47) 1 'London Controlling Section: Terms of Reference' 8 December 1947.

⁸ CAB 81/81, LCS (47) 1 'Deception Policy: Proposals for Future Executive Committee' 31 March 1947.

⁹ DEFE 28/76 'Deception Policy' 3 July 1947. See Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand*, pp.371-372.

¹⁰ DEFE 28/118, Wild 'Deception: Report on Progress', 4 June 1948. It remains unclear whether or not the Cambridge spies were responsible for this. The available LCS and DFP documents from the later 1950s that examine the difficulties in the late 1940s do not mention them; they do however refer to atom spies like Klaus Fuchs, and, later in the 1950s, to the Soviet mole in SIS George Blake.

that deception was viable, and that the LCS should develop techniques to counter Soviet security, but also that the organisation should be more closely integrated with the Joint Planners.¹¹ The Hollis Committee met too infrequently to ensure working cooperation. To increase efficiency it was agreed that the LCS should report directly to the Directors of Plans and the Chiefs of Staff Committee. This rendered the Hollis Committee redundant; it met for the last time in December 1949.¹² Its members debated who should lead the LCS under the new order: Hollis favoured an intelligence officer, recommending Malcolm Cumming of MI5;¹³ Admiral of the Fleet, Lord Bruce Fraser suggested the Royal Marines Colonel, R. H. Quill.¹⁴ But the position was offered to another veteran, John A. Drew.

Drew had been involved in wartime deception and security, working at the Cabinet Office. He remained an advisor on deception to the Chief Staff officer to the Minister of Defence, Sir William Elliot, and had operated as Edward Bridges' representative on the Hollis Committee.¹⁵ Describing him as a 'real intelligence enthusiast', Harold Parker, Permanent Secretary to the Ministry of Defence, recommended his appointment, and Emanuel Shinwell, the Minister of Defence, agreed in May 1950.¹⁶ Under Drew's leadership the LCS gained more staff, worked closely with the JIC and the JPS, and expanded into the empire. It was also renamed. Drew believed the moniker attracted too much attention in a colonial context. The LCS briefly became the Forward Planning Section then, in February 1951, the Directorate of Forward Plans (DFP), with Drew as Director of Forward Plans.¹⁷

The Strategic Problem and Deception Policy

Deceptions always exist in a particular strategic context. The context defines the objectives; it also defines the available techniques. In war the problem is generally simpler.¹⁸ Consider the Second World War: the enemy was clear, there were military objectives to support, and Hitler's intelligence apparatus, although ruthless, was weak in crucial respects that the Allies could exploit. This context determined which techniques were viable: most notably, double-agents. The great wartime deceptions were made possible by the successes of British intelligence. MI5 ensured that practically all German agents in Britain were controlled, allowing British authorities to supply the Nazis with bogus information. Bletchley Park's code-breakers ensured the LCS and the Double-Cross Committee

¹¹ FO 1093/380, LCS (49) 1, 'Review of Overall Deception Policy', 7 January 1949.

¹² DEFE 28/180, HC (49) 2nd Meeting, 8 December 1949.

¹³ DEFE 28/180, Hollis to Elliot, 6 December 1949.

¹⁴ DEFE 28/180, Fraser to Elliot, 3 January 1950.

¹⁵ DEFE 28/180, Memorandum to Elliot 'London Controlling Section', 25 April 1950.

¹⁶ DEFE 28/180, Elliot to Minister, 2 May 1950.

¹⁷ DEFE 28/70, Memorandum by Drew, 14 February 1951.

¹⁸ See J. C. Masterman, *The Double-cross System in the War of 1939 to 1945* (London: Yale University Press).

could monitor the implementation of their schemes through SIGINT. The wartime deceivers cut their teeth in very particular circumstances.

The Soviet threat posed different challenges, a different context. The LCS faced a more powerful, more secure enemy, at point when Britain was poor, demobilising and loosening security measures. By 1948 the JIC was certain the USSR was an implacable foe, and that Britain was outgunned.¹⁹ Its early estimates were inflated, but credited the Soviets with 170 divisions and 15,000 front-line aircraft, 'enough to overrun Western Europe and to reach the Atlantic coast in forty days from the outbreak of hostilities'.²⁰ The Soviets were also developing the bomb; they tested their first in 1949, years earlier than the JIC estimated.²¹ Additionally, Stalin's USSR was a harder intelligence challenge than Hitler's Germany. It was harder to penetrate; its communications security was superior; its internal security was effective; and its foreign intelligence capabilities unparalleled.²² JIC Chair, Harold Caccia, summed up the challenge, noting 'in view of the difficulty of piercing the iron ring of Russian controlled territory "C's" field is wider and task harder than ever before.'²³ Repeating the double-agent and SIGINT based deceptions of the war was highly unlikely.

The USSR's strength limited the LCSs potential, but it also helped define their Cold War role: the organisation was, after all, rejuvenated in response to the Soviet threat. The matter of what exactly it should do took time to settle; deception policy continued to evolve to 1950. However, it was clear from 1947 that deception was to be linked to Britain's primary strategic objective, deterrence. The reality of war with the USSR was underlined in the late 1940s, most notably in the Tizard report, which argued that Britain could not prevent atomic weapons being delivered onto its shores and could not survive another total war.²⁴ Despite the JIC's judgement that the Soviets were unlikely to attack before 1956, war by miscalculation was possible. Therefore, the main objective of British planners and politicians was to devise strategies of deterrence. This objective was most clearly stated in the 1952 Global Strategy Paper, but was visible for the preceding seven years. The Overall Strategic Plan of 1947 was, as Baylis states, 'not a strategy for fighting a war against the Soviet

¹⁹ Percy Cradock, *Know Your Enemy: How the Joint Intelligence Committee Saw the World* (London: John Murray, 2002) p.27.

²⁰ Cradock, *Know Your Enemy*, p.52.

²¹ Michael S. Goodman, *Spying on the Nuclear Bear: Anglo-American Intelligence and the Soviet Bomb* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007) p.19.

²² The Soviet's foreign intelligence successes and internal repression are discussed in Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive: The KGB in Europe and the West* (London: Penguin, 2001), and Robert W. Pringle, 'Modernisation of Terror: The Transformation of Stalin's NKVD, 1934-1941', *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence*, 17/1 (2004).

²³ Keith Jeffery, *MI6: The History of the Secret Intelligence Service*, (Bloomsbury: London, 2010), p.621.

²⁴ See Lewis, *Changing Direction*, chapter five 'The Joint Technical Warfare Committee and the Future Nature of Warfare 1945-6'.

Union, but rather one for preventing it'.²⁵ The CoS's 1947 paper on Future Defence Policy noted that Britain had 'to prevent war, provided that this can be done without prejudicing our vital interests.' The LCS's 1947 'Overall deception policy' was drafted with reference to the CoS's papers.²⁶ The object of deception policy, it noted, was to 'deter and if possible prevent the Russians and their satellites from armed aggression.'²⁷

By 1950 and the Korean War this policy was refined to reflect the range of circumstances in foreign and military policy where deception might play a role. The LCS and the CoS set out what they believed deception was for, and what the LCS could achieve. First, there was a planning function. The LCS worked closely with the CoS and the Joint Planners to ensure that national strategy and military plans had deceptive components. In 1951 it judged that 'if war comes we have reasonable confidence that we can place in the hands of commanders in the field a weapon which, if it is not as finely tempered as the one we forged in the last war, will at the least prove a useful addition to our armoury'.²⁸ Second, deception operations could be useful in an imperial context, in preventing the spread of Communism and for managing restive nationalistic leaders. Third, 'opportunistic' operations could be designed in response to contingencies or emergencies. Finally, there were 'pure' peacetime deceptions, designed to pursue British interests and imperial strategy. With regards the USSR these were concerned with deterring aggression, and subverting its strength.²⁹ By 1950 the LCS was active in a number of areas, but supporting deterrence was its primary mission.

Deception for Deterrence: Plans and Operations

The precise scale and nature of British deception for deterrence in the early Cold War is obscured by official secrecy. Nevertheless certain operations can be examined. They illustrate that the LCS and the DFP were active and ambitious, but that their early large-scale plans for strategic deterrence often foundered before implementation. What remained were smaller operations, designed to distract the Soviets or give them pause.

In 1947, the LCS concluded that, in principle, it could aid deterrence in several senses: by exaggerating the strength of British weapons; by emphasizing Britain's willingness to use them at the

²⁵ John Baylis, 'The British Global Strategy Paper of 1952', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 16/2 (1993) p.206.

²⁶ CAB 81/80, LCS (47) 4 (Final) 'Overall Deception Policy: Immediate Future', 29 July 1947.

²⁷ CAB 81/80, LCS (47) 10, 'Overall Deception Policy – Immediate Future', 3 November 1947.

²⁸ DEFE 28/179, 'The Aims and Technique of Strategic Deception'.

²⁹ CAB 81/80, HC (49) 3 (Final), 'Revised Overall Deception Policy: Immediate Future', 1 March 1949.

outset of a war; and though political means.³⁰ Within these broad categories it spawned a series of plans. In June 1947 it circulated a report on 'Atomic Scientific Research and Production', highlighting the potential to mislead the Soviets with regards research and technology. The most fruitful areas were advances in aircraft design, anti-aircraft weapons, and the production of fissile material.³¹ They also worked with the Admiralty to exaggerate the performance of Walter submarines.³² This was followed by a plan to deter a Soviet air attack by convincing them the Cabinet Defence Committee had agreed to disperse British forces and industry throughout the Commonwealth, guaranteeing a second-strike capability.³³ This was accompanied by plans to protect British airbases in the Middle East by preventing the spread of Communism.³⁴ Most early schemes came to nothing. In 1948, upon reviewing the overall deception concept for deterring atomic attack, the Hollis Committee judged it too ambitious. They believed it was possible to lay the foundations for deceptions emphasizing British strength, ability, 'and intention vigorously to retaliate against any aggression', but little more.³⁵

Indeed, the initial planning work conducted by the LCS was beset by many problems. The USSR's raw power made it difficult for the LCS to concoct plausible weapons or orders of battle that would constitute a meaningful deterrent. Weak British security was also an issue; without wartime controls on movement and censorship it was difficult to maintain physical deceptions.³⁶ Conversely, tight Soviet security rendered it less susceptible to deceptions. Additionally, it was inevitable that Cold War deception work would be conducted with the US, but their deception machinery was underdeveloped and many US commanders dismissed deception as a valuable tool. Owing to these factors for the first two years after 1947 the LCS concerned itself mainly with planning, and attempting to devise ways to convey deceptive information to the Soviets, rather than implementing operations.³⁷ However, some plans were developed and pursued, in Europe and the Far East. They illustrate how the LCS operated in the more confined Cold War environment. They also underline that the early problems with planning and implementing Cold War deceptions remained largely irresolvable.

European Operations and the HOUSE PARTY Committee

³⁰ CAB 81/80, LCS (47)3, 'Atomic Scientific Research and Production', 9 June 1947.

³¹ CAB 80/81, LCS (47) 3 (Preliminary Draft) 'Atomic Scientific Research and Production', 9 June 1947.

³² DEFE 28/75, LCS 580/3-5, Minutes of Hollis Committee 30 November 1948.

³³ CAB 80/81, LCS (47) 7, 'A Deception Policy for Peace Calculated to Assist the Future Defence of the United Kingdom Against Aggression by a Potential Enemy Using Weapons of Mass Destruction' 17 September 1947.

³⁴ CAB 81/80, LCS (47) 6, 'The Spread of Communism – Middle East: Outline Plan', 17 September 1947.

³⁵ DEFE 28/76 'Outline Deception Plan', 9 April 1948.

³⁶ FO 1093/380, LCS (49) 1, 'Review of Overall Deception Policy', 7 January 1949.

³⁷ Lewis, *Changing Direction*, p.lxxxiv.

In 2010 Stephen Twigge and Len Scott published a research note examining a 1954 document proposing an operation to bolster deterrence by convincing the Soviets that British scientists had developed an anti-aircraft 'death ray'. It was unclear then whether this was a whim or a genuine plan.³⁸ Recent releases confirm that it was probably the latter, inspired by an earlier deterrence through deception scheme.

The death ray project was the idea of a small committee of LCS men, atomic scientists and Drew, late in 1948. Their task was to examine the question of strategic and tactical deception once the Soviets developed nuclear weapons. They believed the West's lead in atomic weaponry was the key factor in restraining Soviet aggression. Of course, mutual possession of the bomb eventually resulted in uneasy stability. But atomic strategy was still in its infancy and the LCS believed deterrence was best maintained through superior weapons rather than mutual vulnerability. They concluded that Britain needed a weapon to trump the bomb; they concocted the 'C' project, a secret super-weapon.³⁹

The concept of a death ray was attributed to a mysterious 'Professor X'.⁴⁰ Professor X was, in all likelihood, Sir John Cockcroft, Director of Harwell, the British Atomic Energy Research Establishment. The idea was relatively simple: when conducting scientific research in the nuclear field, or perhaps radar, British scientists had discovered a technique for creating a 'death ray', lethal up to one mile, and deployable from the ground, sea or air.⁴¹ The Soviets would learn of it through controlled leaks, uncontrolled leaks from British personnel who had been themselves deceived, and physical means. Ideally, this would deter them from attacking. Fantastic as the project may sound, it was given serious consideration. A series of secret meetings took place late in 1948 to examine how it might be planned, managed and implemented.

Early discussions focused on security and feasibility. If either aspect was flawed the project would fail. The immediate security problem related to the physical component of the plot, which would inevitably be substantial, involving facilities and numerous personnel. It would have been necessary to provide them with a plausible cover story that supported the plan. As Colonel H. Noel Wild, the LCS's military man, noted 'it should be treated in all respects as if it were indeed a fact and not a deception.' Only a small number of people would know the genuine function of the facilities; all would be managed by the LCS.⁴² With careful planning this side of security was manageable. More

³⁸ Twigge and Scott, 'Strategic Defence by Deception', pp.152-157.

³⁹ DEFE 28/102, 'The "C" project', 18 October 1948.

⁴⁰ DEFE 28/102, Wild, 'The "C" project', 17 September 1948; and 'The "C" project', 18 October 1948.

⁴¹ DEFE 28/102, 'The Stewart Project', 24 September 1948.

⁴² DEFE 28/102, 'The "C" project', 18 October 1948.

complicated was the matter of senior policy makers and officers, many of whom might have to be used in the deception, either wittingly or not. How and when to brief them about the operation and its objectives remained a puzzle.

The matter of feasibility was for the scientists. The LCS organised a consultation with Professor Otto Frisch, the eminent physicist who had worked on the Manhattan project and headed nuclear physics at Harwell. When interviewed by Commander Eric Welsh, Britain's atomic intelligence chief, Wild and Drew, he gave his endorsement, judging the concept plausible – had he heard reports that the Soviets were developing such a weapon, 'it would cause him considerable alarm and anxiety'. In principle, the weapon could be manufactured to fit on a vehicle the size of a modern tank; it required an engine that could generate 1000 horse-power; and it would have to be remote control to protect its operators from radiation. Friche judged that the weapon could be lethal up to about 640 meters.⁴³

The scientists both supported and undermined the project: it was feasible, but not at long or medium range. It posed a danger to its operators and could not be airborne. Therefore the death ray was reduced to a defensive weapon. However, this did not undermine the LCS's enthusiasm for the project. It might not deter the bomb directly, they judged, but it might deter local aggression and escalation. Any invasion risked one side or the other using nuclear weapons. Despite the limited range, the questions of security, and the dangers of inspiring a Soviet death ray, they decided in January 1949 to pursue the project. The project was named HOUSE PARTY, which also became the name of a small committee managing high level deceptions against the USSR.⁴⁴ And it quickly developed two distinct schemes, the death ray, and a political deception.

The Death Ray

The LCS moved on to consider the deterrent potential of the short range death ray. Continued scientific discussion revealed limitations beyond its range, particularly with regards the time enemy troops needed to be exposed for a lethal dose – some 15 minutes at 900 meters.⁴⁵ Some questioned whether this would pose a meaningful deterrent if the Soviets were intent on starting a world war (indeed they may not be at all deterable if this was their true intention). But they believed there was potential for the weapon in deterring local aggression, which could potentially escalate.⁴⁶ The

⁴³ DEFE 28/102, 'First meeting with Professor Otto Frische' 30 December 1948.

⁴⁴ DEFE 28/102, Minutes of meeting 6 January, 'House Party', 6 January 1949.

⁴⁵ DEFE 28/102, Minutes of meeting 20 January, 'House Party', 20 January 1949.

⁴⁶ DEFE 28/102, 'Note for Sir Findlater Stewart', 20 January 1949.

HOUSE PARTY committee agreed that local deterrence was a practical objective, especially if used to deny the Soviets a valuable commodity, like oil. Despite some members questioning whether or not a less fanciful weapon might not be more feasible, Colonel Wild persuaded them to retain the concept, and resolved to develop the plan.⁴⁷

Wild took the concept of 'the weapon' to the Joint Planners. He believed it could supplement their nascent plans for wartime deception, plans designed to direct Soviet troops away from the North West German plains by threatening to breach the bank of the river Weser. The weapon, he judged, might be used to accelerate the process of flooding, or to attack immobilised Soviet troops.⁴⁸ The primary challenge he faced was security: the LCS was wary of allowing knowledge of the deception to spread beyond HOUSE PARTY, and were equally wary of increasing the number of Soviets exposed to the deception. Not only could the plot unravel, but possession of the weapon could bring the UK into disrepute internationally. Worse, it could prompt the Soviets to deploy their resources to developing such a weapon. Nevertheless, the Commander of the British Army of the Rhine, Viscount Montgomery approved of plans to 'establish in Germany a water obstacle supported by special means.'⁴⁹ House Party's atomic specialists, Professor Fry and Welsh, moved on to plan the installations that would be required to mount the deception on a ten-mile front.⁵⁰ As Wild had intimated, and as Montgomery had approved, this would probably be near a choke-point or an obstacle so as to maximise the exposure of advancing troops.

The crucial question was when and how to leak the story to the Soviets: should they be told soon, during a period of rising tensions, or when war appeared imminent? If they were told early, and were sufficiently scared, they might be tempted to pre-empt; too late and the weapon might not affect their plans. HOUSE PARTY decided to be flexible: initially, they would let the Soviets do the work; it was likely that Soviet strategists assumed Britain would defend major rivers. The LCS would leak the plans to flood the Weser, and that the obstacle was supported by a new, secret weapon. The leak would be compatible with a cover story fed to allies as the weapon's facilities were built. Finally, if war seemed imminent the LCS would leak the 'true' nature of the weapon.⁵¹ HOUSE PARTY hoped that this would function as a deterrent, give the Soviets pause, and let calmer heads prevail.

Matters developed over March 1949 as Wild sought to integrate the deception firmly into allied defensive plans. It was crucial to have *some* consultation with allies; dissuading the Soviet attack on

⁴⁷ DEFE 28/102, Minutes of meeting 20 January, 'House Party', 20 January 1949.

⁴⁸ DEFE 28/102, Minutes of meeting 20 January, 'House Party', 28 February 1949.

⁴⁹ DEFE 28/102, House Party Meeting, 7 March 1949.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

the British line might make them stop and think, but might simply divert their attack. Montgomery's Chief of Staff, General Ronald Belchem was set to meet General Hubener, the US General in charge of the US army of occupation, and consult about the possibility of British plans diverting Soviet forces onto his lines. He did not mention the deception.⁵²

Meanwhile planning for 'the weapon's' facilities were on hold owing to production problems in Britain's atomic industrial pipeline. The principal challenge was the beehive valve, a component in radar units and particle accelerators. The atomic scientists recommended to HOUSE PARTY that any construction related to the deception should be delayed lest the production problems leak and undermine the deception, or divert important personnel from genuine roles in the nuclear industry.⁵³

The production problems were overcome by April. The scientists reported to HOUSE PARTY that they had composed detailed plans of the weapon's facilities. It required a modest building, some sixteen feet by four. But it required a cooling system and a generator, which were more substantial; Frisch estimated that the facilities required some 400 gallons of water a minute. They were also expensive: the initial developments could cost up to one million pounds, and each weapon thereafter about £30,000. Apparently content with this, HOUSE PARTY pushed the development of the plan, accepting the design of the weapon and encouraging Frisch to elaborate on his ideas for a more powerful weapon that required less generator power.⁵⁴

HOUSE PARTY maintained its enthusiasm because the production setback was balanced by developments that could help ensure that the 'death ray' story found purchase. Press articles had drawn the public's attention to the dangers of bombardment by gamma radiation. These were related to a series of tests being carried out on HMS Arethusa, measuring the vulnerability of naval vessels to radiation, and 'the somewhat sensationally quoted' remarks of a noted German physics expert, Professor Heisenberg, about the possibility of 'gun-projector' radioactive weapons. HOUSE PARTY instructed Wild and Welsh to exploit the HMS Arethusa trials.⁵⁵ They developed a relatively straightforward plan: a craft fitted with a convincing dummy weapon would periodically appear in the vicinity of the trials. John Cockcroft agreed to make an appearance to support the deception.⁵⁶ All they required was for Menzies to persuade the First Sea Lord to approve the operation. Given the

⁵² DEFE 28/102, House Party Meeting, 23 March 1949.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ DEFE 28/102, House Party Meeting, 11 April 1949.

⁵⁵ DEFE 28/102, House Party Meeting, 23 March 1949.

⁵⁶ DEFE 28/102, House Party Meeting, 11 April 1949.

support the DFP received during later operations, such as those surrounding Britain's first atomic tests in 1952, it is likely that the services would have supported the deception.

The documentary trail runs cold at this point, but three details suggest that the operation was pursued further. First, the archival record suggests there is more to the operation; files pertaining to the HOUSE PARTY committee remain retained. Second, as the note uncovered by Twigge and Scott demonstrates, the idea of a 'death ray' deception remained in the minds of planners throughout the 1950s.⁵⁷ Third, the death ray was to have been a specific but very secretive component of a broader British deception scheme to be implemented in the event of war. The objective of this plan, the WESER Project, was to convince the Soviets that Western forces intended to defend the Weser-Elbe line thereby forcing the Soviets to advance through more closed country, south of the German plains, and gain more time for the genuine allied retreat to the Rhine. Conceived in 1949, it foundered initially because 'Anglo/US factual plans were in a state of some fluidity', and because of the US Chiefs of Staff's apparent dislike for deceptive operations. It lay dormant before Britain attempted to revive it in September 1952, probably with the super-weapon.⁵⁸

Political Deception

Owing to the difficulties with the death ray the HOUSE PARTY Committee began to consider other ways to deter the Soviets. This began as a vague invitation for the Committee to 'examine another line altogether', but it was developed by Sir Brian Mountain, whose role on the committee is unclear. He suggested a more sophisticated approach to deterrence, one based on exploiting the adversary's weaknesses rather than driving the arms race. He believed that the fundamental mistrust and suspicion that was pervasive in the Soviet Union, both between the people and their leaders, and between Russia and its satellites, could be exploited. He suggested how in a note titled 'deterrent against Russians waging war'.⁵⁹

He believed the Soviets may react in a manner that suited British interests if they could be persuaded that they had problems with internal dissent. Soviet fighting power, he judged, depended significantly upon their ability to compel the masses, noting if 'those in Supreme authority could be given cause to doubt their ability to hold down the nation, they would not commit them to war'.⁶⁰ Creating or amplifying these doubts would have taken time, but was plausible given the Soviets'

⁵⁷ Twigge and Scott, 'Strategic Defence by Deception'.

⁵⁸ DEFE 28/185, 'The Weser Plan' attached to Drew to Whiteley, 25 November 1953.

⁵⁹ DEFE 28/102, Note by Sir Brian Mountain, undated.

⁶⁰ DEFE 28/102, 'Deterrent against Russians waging war', undated.

record of paranoia and purges. He proposed creating the impression of an underground movement and supplementing it by framing an unwitting Russian citizen who was visiting or was based in the West, possibly an ambassador. HOUSE PARTY intended to plant sufficient materials on him to, in its words, 'incriminate him to such an extent that he would be recalled for questioning. Through his innocence, he would be unable to answer many questions put to him, and would by denying his guilt, merely incriminate himself further, if the material was planted in him in a clever enough way'.⁶¹

Little concern for the patsy's fate is reflected in the memoranda. Indeed, if the plan worked as designed he would have been one of many. The intention was to create maximum disruption. As HOUSE PARTY noted, 'the result that might accrue from all this would be either a purge, which could only do us good and the Russians harm, and if it came at such a time when the Russians were menacing world peace by exploiting another minority, might well result in deterring them from this, or better still from aggression if that was their motive.'⁶² Complicated and ruthless, they knew the operation 'would require the greatest ingenuity and case in planning and artistry in implementation'.⁶³ Although it remains unclear the degree to which past British, Soviet and indeed German operations influenced Mountain, it is striking how similar it was in concept to the operations the Soviet security services had run against the British during the inter war years, and were still running in Eastern Europe, building Soviet run resistance networks and drawing SIS and CIA funded emerges to their deaths.

HOUSE PARTY adopted the idea.⁶⁴ However, the plan was based on particular assumptions about the USSR and these needed testing. They required a Soviet perspective, and this was supplied by SIS. SIS had managed a Soviet aeronautical engineer named Lieutenant Colonel Grigori Tokaev since he defected in October 1947. Despite proving troublesome, he was the first high-level Soviet defector in Germany, and considered very valuable.⁶⁵ Codenamed EXCISE, he was the clear choice for those who required insights into Soviet thinking. Over a series of meetings Tokaev confirmed that the premise of the operation was sound, giving the committee 'a very clear indication of Russian strategic anxiety'. He noted that the key to success was ensuring the origin of the plot was well disguised; any hint of outside intervention would probably backfire.⁶⁶

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ DEFE 28/102, House Party, 2 February 1949.

⁶⁵ Jeffery, *MI6*, p.666.

⁶⁶ DEFE 28/102, 'Meeting with EXCISE', 22 February 1949.

HOUSE PARTY concurred. In its judgement, several criteria had to be met if the plan was to work. It required a plausible story, the means to reinforce the original deception once the Soviets became interested, and an appropriate Soviet politician or military figure. By late March 1949 Wild believed they had found their man, the Soviet General Staff Officer, General Aleksei Antonov. He was known to British intelligence and to the Soviets as having been involved in various subversive activities, and had survived, they judged, 'through the betrayal of some of his comrades.' This provided the LCS with a crucial piece of kindling: existing suspicion. Manipulating internal suspicions was far easier than exporting them from London. Ideally, the LCS planned to engineer a situation whereby the MGB would have acquired incriminating evidence implicating Antonov in some subversive activity. Once this was publicised, stories would have been leaked to the press tying in other prominent Soviets. As HOUSE PARTY explained, 'a chain reaction of purge could be started within the General Staff of the Soviet Army, which if skilfully encouraged from without, might involve very important personalities, and cause the regime very serious embarrassment.' This was 'plan one'; Wild, Drew, Kirby, and another whose name remains redacted, began planning in detail.⁶⁷

They briefed HOUSE PARTY in April. Their objective remained to bolster deterrence by persuading the Soviets to focus internally. They judged it unlikely that the plan would have negative effects on any indigenous subversive networks. Indeed, some hoped the operation, even if not wholly successful, would prompt some implicated individuals to defect lest they become victims of a potential purge. HOUSE PARTY agreed and determined that the planning progress to the practical and technical stages. The plan required the Soviets to intercept incriminating radio traffic, so they required a transmitter, a suitable broadcasting location, and a Russian linguist. With C's blessing this begin immediately; the Antonov element required more time, a detailed written plan and Foreign Office clearance, however an established history of suspicious radio intercepts would have probably helped incriminate him.⁶⁸ The plan was adopted on 11 April 1949.

The documentary trail runs cold following these minutes; the progression of the deceptions is difficult to judge. Nevertheless, some indications are discernible. General Antonov was not purged. Indeed, he was promoted Deputy Commander in Chief and then Commander in Chief of the Trans-Caucasus Military District. By 1955, he was Chief of Staff of the Combined Forces of the Warsaw Pact. Clearly, this aspect failed. However there are glimpses available of how the political deception may have been applied more broadly, just as HOUSE PARTY intended. The plan to encourage the

⁶⁷ DEFE 28/102, House Party Meeting, 23 March 1949. There was also a 'plan two'. This was a scheme concocted in relative haste in response to rumours that a reshuffle of the Politbureau in Moscow signified a significant split between Molotov and Stalin. The LCS suggested that perhaps they could be framed. Ultimately, however, they concluded that they did not have enough intelligence to design a plausible operation.

⁶⁸ DEFE 28/102, House Party Meeting, 11 April 1949.

USSR to focus internally, deterring them from external aggression by using fake radio signals, appears to have proceeded, under the codename FLITTER. Files pertaining to the operation remain retained, but suggest several things. First, that the operation ran between 1950 and 1953, possibly until 1955; second, that it was radio based; and third, that like all the LCS's successful operations it was based on a mix of fact and fiction.⁶⁹ FLITTER was managed by HOUSE PARTY, chaired by Stuart Menzies, 'C', and received input from the broader intelligence community. Tokaev/EXCISE continued to act as advisor, commenting on developments in the Soviet Union that included the Leningrad purges of 1950-1951, and the tensions between Molotov and Stalin.⁷⁰ Using his insights, FLITTER attempted to implicate plausible individuals in subversive plots. This included an individual who was considered by HOUSE PARTY to be 'a very important oppositionist, but whom the MVD have never been able to identify,' an alleged member of the Central Committee of the USSR, possibly Ivlev.⁷¹ Tokaev suggested that Ivlev's name could be used to authenticate the FLITTER messages, and they proceeded accordingly, planning to broadcast a series of suspicious messages, including 'For Ivlev. Instructions received. Am awaiting new orders.'⁷² This was to be tied to a series of messages relating to discontent in Baku, linking Ivlev with subversive activities, and some pamphleteering. This would, HOUSE PARTY hoped, 'foment genuine trouble'.⁷³

FLITTER was but one political operation conducted by the LCS that was designed to encourage the Soviets to focus internally. They also planned to smear staff in the Russian film industry, hopefully diverting MVD resources and possibly slowing the distribution of Soviet propaganda.⁷⁴ Clearly the LCS was pushing on an open door in this regard. Little evidence suggests that their efforts prompted heavy handed MVD activity, but it is likely that it helped. As Richard Aldrich has argued, operations that suggested internal security problems, played directly into Stalin's paranoia.⁷⁵ And this glimpse into HOUSE PARTY's activities provides clear evidence that Britain sought not only to maximise the impact of Stalin's purges, but to instigate them and deter foreign adventurism.

Deception and Deterrence in the Far East

⁶⁹ See the file descriptions in the National Archive's catalogue for DEFE 28/82, DEFE 28/83, DEFE 28/84, DEFE 28/85, DEFE 28/86, DEFE 28/88.

⁷⁰ DEFE 28/102, 'Notes on conversation between Wild, Chelly, and EXCISE, 13 February 1951.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ DEFE 28/7, Note to Drew, 1 December 1952.

⁷⁵ Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand*, p.174.

British deception was not only targeted at Stalin, it was a tool for imperial security. Far Eastern activities included theatre defence by deterrence plans and more limited operations in colonial wars. The resources at the DFP's disposal in these circumstances were small, and the more ambitious operations were often undermined by similar factors that undermined ambitious European schemes.

The LCS established outposts in the Middle East and Far East in 1950. The Forward Planning Officer arrived in Singapore to begin work early in 1951. Initially the organisation was three officers strong, a Forward Planning Officer, at General Headquarters, a Federation Officer based with Special Branch in Kuala Lumpur, whose main role was to manage covert actions against the Malayan Communists, and a Tactical Officer who supported him.⁷⁶ The Far Eastern cell, Forward Planning Section (FE), FPS (FE) operated for about three years before being cut back to a single member of staff who worked in the office of MI5's Far East hub, Security Intelligence Far East.

FPS (FE) was deployed with a clear brief to support theatre defence and help subdue rebels who threatened British rule. However, the complex environment and difficulties of working with allies made planning and implementing its schemes very difficult. Drew had suspected this would be the case, noting 'the situation is much more complex and fluid than it is in the other two main theatres...'⁷⁷ But he retained some optimism, informing the CoS in 1950 that deception might be of use in uncoupling China from the USSR. He believed plans could be drawn that 'would play upon the known xenophobia of the Chinese and lead them to believe (what may well be the fact) that it is the Russian intention to make China as much a vassal state as Czechoslovakia or Hungary.' Drew went on to note that 'this proposition might be tackled in various ways, e.g. by black propaganda inside China purporting to be Russian Communist in Origins and by the use of traditional Chinese secret societies who are in the main anti-communist because their normal activities of blackmail and the levying of 'protection' money, etc, have been taken over by the Communists.'⁷⁸ This optimism was short lived.

Two FPS (FE) designed theatre defence plans are visible in the archives, one focused on Hong Kong, the other on a number of British territories, both a response to the Korean War. Both were defence by deterrence schemes, designed to convey the impression that fragile British outposts could be reinforced far quicker, and more robustly than in fact was the case. Both foundered for lack of international support.

The Hong Kong plan was focused on deterring Chinese attack, and was presented to the Chiefs of Staff in July 1950. Judging invasion unlikely, the Joint Planners believed the Chinese would attempt

⁷⁶ DEFE 11/377, COS (50) 548, 'Deception Staffs in the Far East', 29 December 1950.

⁷⁷ DEEF 28/43, 'A policy for Deception' attached to D. B. G. D, 9 August 1950.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

to undermine imperial control with subversive methods, combined with maintaining a robust external threat. FPS (FE) judged the best method to counter this was to demonstrate that British policy was to reinforce the garrison substantially in the event of any emergency, and to quell any uprising.⁷⁹ Rumours were to be spread that air assets could be transferred from Malaya at short notice. The rumours were to be reinforced by covert measures, passing misleading information to specific secret 'channels', and also more the conspicuous steps of enlarging runways and facilities to prepare for extra aircraft and aircrew. Similar preparations would have been taken with regard ground troops: rumours spread, facilities prepared, and movement simulated. The instrument of deception in this case would have been the parachute regiment.⁸⁰ FPS (FE) believed that Chinese observers would have taken note, and dissidents on Hong Kong would have been deterred from revolutionary action.

The Joint Planners believed this plan had some merits, including not being particularly confrontational. It was also substantial enough to generate some reaction, and therefore a clue to China's intentions. However, the CoS believed the situation too fluid to implement even marginally provocative deceptions. They deferred any action until reports on the actual possibilities for reinforcing Hong Kong became available, and until the US had been consulted.⁸¹ Owing to the latter factor, it is unlikely that the scheme was implemented in a significant form. US support was vital for a plausible deterrent, but productive US engagement in deception schemes was still some years away.

The second plan was a theatre deception designed to defend Hong Kong and Malaya; it faced similar challenges. Planning was set in motion soon after the Forward Planning Officer's arrival in the Far East, and the draft operation intended to produce a deterrent to Chinese attack by showing that Britain possessed sufficient forces to repel aggression, or make it too costly. It was first submitted to the Chiefs of Staff in August 1951, and eventually they approved of the concept by September the following year.

It had three key components. Part one stressed the strength of allied cohesion in the Far East: an attack on one of the three powers would be considered an attack on all. The basis of this deception was the Washington talks between Churchill and Truman. It was to be leaked that during a secret session the President agreed that an attack against British interests would draw immediate American reaction. Planted public statements would have been made alluding to this agreement. These would have been reinforced by stories about advanced weaponry available for any operation

⁷⁹ CAB 121/110, COS (50) 11th Mtg, 'Deception in the far East and other areas' 17 July 1950.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

– including atomic, biological, and chemical munitions. Part two, related to Hong Kong, was designed to create the impression that any attack on the colony would be countered by retaliation not only locally, but on Chinese territory. Like part one, it depended on the availability of American forces, specifically naval and air forces based on the Philippines, Okinawa, and Taiwan. Part three was designed to persuade the Chinese that Malaya would be robustly defended and reinforced in the event of any attack.⁸²

The DFP believed they might secure US cooperation. But this hope was quickly dashed. The British military representatives in Washington revealed the US remained unlikely to accede to a theatre deception plan until the forthcoming five power talks on Far East strategy were complete. Even then, their deception machinery was undeveloped, and, in contrast to the UK, they had no set policy on the use of deception in peace. This rendered parts one and two impossible.⁸³ Only part three was feasible, so Britain had to work with the Australians and the New Zealanders, who they approached late in 1952, gaining the approval of the Australian defence committee. But without broader support implementation of the plan was delayed. Ultimately it was overtaken by events, specifically SEATO, and the plan was rejected by the Australian Defence Minister.⁸⁴ The failure highlighting, once again, the difficulty Britain had in implementing strategic deception in the Cold War environment.

The Uses and Limits of Deception for Deterrence in the Early Cold War

Two key factors account for the limited potential of British deterrence by deception schemes in the early Cold War. The first was the nature of Britain's enemies. The LCS faced extremely robust enemies, as indeed did the broader intelligence community. This defined the objectives of deception, supporting deterrence, but it also limited the deception organisation's potential as it limited the techniques at their disposal, and potentially undermined them from within. This was an intractable problem.

The nature of the enemy presented three main challenges in terms of planning and implementing the deceptions. First, the Soviets were aware of British wartime deception operations; they would doubtless be more vigilant than the Germans.⁸⁵ Second, and related, Soviet security agencies were extremely effective. Wartime strategic deception had utilised several trusted double-agent

⁸² DEFE 28/34, COS (52) 409 'Strategic Deception as an Aid to Defence in the Far East', 6 July 1952.

⁸³ DEFE 11/377, Annex 1 to, COS (52) 505 'Strategic Deception as an Aid to Defence in the Far East', 10 September 1952.

⁸⁴ CAB 121/110, Drew to Secretary COS Committee, 'Appointment of Mr. Buchanan', 21 January 1954.

⁸⁵ See Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand*, pp.374-5.

'channels' to convey information to the Germans. But British intelligence found it extraordinarily difficult to develop reliable 'channels' into the USSR and China. Without double-agents deception operations relied on indirect, less effective methods, such as publishing misleading press articles, or working through trade missions. Indeed, trade missions offered the LCS a rare opportunity to feed disinformation directly into the Soviet bureaucracy, and they hoped to implement deceptions slowly over time by 'drip feeding' information to Soviet representatives.⁸⁶ However, the technique was neither very quick nor very reliable.

Third, British intelligence on its main Cold War rivals was poor. This affected deception planning because, as the wartime deceivers had learned, plans had to relate to the adversary's specific beliefs and prejudices.⁸⁷ Without good intelligence designing plausible deception was extremely problematic. Poor intelligence also affected implementation: it was very difficult to confirm whether or not the Soviets believed deceptions. Without feedback the LCS had little insight as to how it should adapt its operations; it was far more likely that the target could utilise the operation for its own ends; and there was little scope for ensuring that schemes designed to deter were not in fact provoking, or, in the case of the death ray, inspiring. The lack of feedback and the consequent danger of provocation remained visible in later Cold War operations, such as Operation CELESTIAL, a 1957 plan designed to persuade the Soviets that US Thor intermediate range ballistic missiles that were based in the UK could be launched on warning, therefore ensuring retaliation; it was a consistent flaw in technical deception for deterrence operations.⁸⁸

The second factor inhibiting the LCS's performance was the difficulty of working with allies. Several British deterrence-by-deception operations in the period in question were undermined because US commanders declined to offer their support. Having been eager practitioners of the art during the war the US deception machinery had fallen into disrepair by the late 1940s.⁸⁹ Their main inter-service deception body, known as the Orange Team, was small and not particularly active. In December 1947, Stuart Menzies noted his 'grave doubts as to the ability of the Americans to take part in any active deception'.⁹⁰ It was left to the nascent CIA to develop doctrine and capability. Drew commented in 1953 that he was 'well content with the general atmosphere and the understanding of the possibilities of deception which I found in conversation with all the levels of CIA... unfortunately, I cannot say the same about the Orange Team'.⁹¹ The CIA eventually became

⁸⁶ DEFE 28/118, 'Proposed Channel for Deception', 9 October 1947.

⁸⁷ DEFE 28/179, Undated handwritten note on 'Technique of Deception', probably penned by John Drew.

⁸⁸ See Len Scott and Huw Dylan, 'Cover for Thor'.

⁸⁹ DEFE 28/76, Hollis to Saunders, 2 December 1947.

⁹⁰ FO 1093/380, Menzies 'Deception: American co-operation', 26 January 1948.

⁹¹ CAB 121/110, Elliot to Brownjohn, 2 November 1953.

valuable partners. But even as late as 1957 the DFP believed that the Americans acknowledged British superiority in planning and implementing deception.⁹²

This affected British planning in the Far East. But it also affected plans in Europe. US disinterest affected the 'C project' indirectly, by compromising the complementary WESER Project. As noted above, this was a British plan designed to delay the Soviet advance across the north-west German plains in the event of an invasion. It originated from a draft deception plan penned by Major General David Belchem, then Chief of Staff to Bernard Montgomery, in December 1949.⁹³ Belchem wanted to deter the Soviets from attacking, and persuade them that, were they to, Western plans were defensive and based upon defending West Germany at major water obstacles, namely the Elbe and the Weser; they would only retreat to the Rhine if absolutely necessary.⁹⁴ His original plan was critiqued by the LCS, but they adopted and adapted the concept. They designed a scheme to gain time for a British withdrawal to the Rhine by persuading the Soviets that the north-west German plains were impassable. Their objective was exaggerating the degree to which it was possible to inundate the territory along the course of the river Weser, forcing the Soviets to advance through closer, more mountainous terrain to the South.⁹⁵ They believed the plan was difficult to implement, but that any delay in Soviet advance would benefit Western troops.⁹⁶

The LCS worked to integrate other, more secretive, deterrence focused deceptions like the 'C Project' into the WESER Project. In March 1949 they sent a draft plan to the Western Union staff, where it was well received by Montgomery and some of his American colleagues.⁹⁷ However, the security and coordination problems involved in implementing the scheme meant that little progress was achieved. The plan sat dormant until late in 1952 when the LCS attempted to revive it in a limited manner in British sectors in Germany.⁹⁸ Drew conceded that working in this limited manner clearly undermined the effectiveness of the plan, and that the three year delay was very detrimental. But this, he noted, was characteristic, explaining to General Whitley, Britain's representative on the NATO Standing Group, that this was the 'story of strategic deception planning in SHAPE. Here the moral is that the Americans don't like the idea and probably never will until the

⁹² Scott and Dylan, 'Cover for Thor', p.799.

⁹³ DEFE 28/185, Belchem to Hollis, 23 December 1948.

⁹⁴ DEFE 28/185, 'Deception in Western Europe, 22 December 1948.

⁹⁵ DEFE 28/185, 'Deception – Western Union: Outline Plan', 3 March 1949.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ DEFE 28/185, 'The Weser Plan' attached to Drew to Whitley, 26 November 1953.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

Joint Chiefs of Staff are converted – if they ever are.⁹⁹ Without the support of its most powerful ally it was inevitable that Britain had to focus on more limited deceptions.

Conclusion

The Chiefs of Staff endorsed deception as a viable tool for Cold War, as did SIS, despite understanding the constraints on its potential. However, as the early iteration of the super-weapon scheme, and DFP(FE)'s plans demonstrate, strategic deception was quickly proven impractical. Very little could be done to exaggerate British conventional strength in peacetime to plausibly constitute a meaningful deterrent. The Soviets capacity to gather intelligence on British forces put paid to large order of battle exaggerations. And maintaining large operations over indeterminate timescales was far more difficult without wartime levels of security and information control, or the support of allies. Instead the LCS/DFP had to focus on limited deception for deterrence operations, ones that distracted the Soviets or potentially halted escalation. The DFP seems to have applied this lesson to subsequent deterrence operations. Operation CELESTIAL, for example, relied on communicating largely accurate information about the missiles, coupled with judicious exaggeration, from an environment Britain could control.¹⁰⁰

By 1956 several factors had conspired to undermine the DFPs work. These factors included the George Blake case, and Soviet technological advances that rendered them less susceptible to scientific deceptions. One unidentified commentator noted that 'it can be stated that from around 1956 onwards we have lost much of the initiative in deception operations...'¹⁰¹ Prior to this, however, the early Cold War disappointments of the LCS's deterrence operations did not dampen their enthusiasm. Britain did not jettison the concept of ambitious, strategic operations, but the discernible operations are aimed at weaker targets than the Soviets. These were targets against which Britain could exploit superior intelligence capability and benefit from feedback, for example the deceptions that accompanied British negotiations for the Baghdad Pact.¹⁰² The evidence also indicates the DFP planned and implemented schemes with objectives other than deterrence against a broad variety of targets in the early 1950s, including the USSR and China. These plans include Operation TIGRESS, a deception and cover plan accompanying Britain's first atomic test in October

⁹⁹ DEFE 28/185, Drew to Whitley, 26 November 1953.

¹⁰⁰ See Scott and Dylan, 'Cover for Thor'.

¹⁰¹ DEFE 28/1 '1st Draft: A Review of Deception Activities', undated.

¹⁰² Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand*, p.376.

1952.¹⁰³ Applying the lessons of the late 1940s, such operations had modest objectives and were limited in scope. Indeed, perhaps the most important legacy of the LCS's early plans was forcing it to temper its ambitions.

The limited number of sources available on the scope of Britain's peacetime deceptions means that any conclusion must be considered preliminary. But the LCS and DFP doubtlessly had some utility in the Cold War. The primary goal, enhancing deterrence, was a worthy objective whilst Britain could not threaten atomic retaliation, and the right deception could potentially serve this purpose even by sowing a small seed of doubt in Soviet minds. More broadly, deception was another technique in fighting the USSR at a time when Europe lay in ruins and Stalinism was perceived to have the initiative; it was simply another manifestation of British covert action. But these factors must be balanced against the limits of deception. The most serious limitation was the lack of knowledge the LCS and British intelligence in general had on the Soviets' dispositions. The difficulty in gaining useful feedback on their activities meant that deterrent plans could be interpreted as provocations. The parallels between the potentially provocative nature of the 'C' Project and Operation CELESTIAL suggests the deception planners might have been reluctant to acknowledge the danger that their plots might undermine rather than support British interests. How the Soviets interpreted the LCS and the DFP's schemes remains an intriguing question. However, owing to the limited means at the deceivers' disposal in conveying misleading information, and the Soviets' own intelligence network, it is unlikely the LCS achieved anything other than muddying the waters. Mirroring the great strategic successes of the Second World War was extremely difficult, perhaps out of the question.

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¹⁰³ See, Huw Dylan 'Operation TIGRESS: Deception for Counterintelligence and Britain's 1952 Atomic Test', *Journal of Intelligence History* 14/1 (2015).

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